



Photo by Rusty Costanza

Impression: Jackson Smith

By: Kristin Livingston

The resilience and community of New Orleans led Jackson Smith (SLA '07, L '18), a Marine Corps veteran who served in Afghanistan, to make the city his home.

He also sees these themes in the U.S. veterans who inspire him in his job as executive director of Bastion Community of Resilience.

"Members of the Bastion community are veterans," he said, "but they're New Orleanians first."

Bastion is designed for veterans by veterans based in New Orleans. Providing more than houses, the community offers veterans a place to heal, live, support and be supported after returning from service. Located at 1901 Mirabeau Ave., on 5.5 acres in the Gentilly neighborhood, Bastion is the first of its kind, according to Smith.

Residents sign leases with a non-affiliated property owner and can receive full or partial financial housing support through HUD vouchers and other sources.

“The leasing model gives residents the ability to stay at Bastion longterm if they so desire, thus providing the longevity needed to establish meaningful relationships across the community,” said Smith. “Regardless of any resident’s housing costs, every member of the community has access to the nonprofit’s treatment programs, clinicians, resources and community events at no cost whatsoever.”

The Bastion concept works because it removes barriers to treatment as it lessens the burden that many veterans feel when trying to heal on their own. It’s not just about neighbors holding each other accountable for treatment regimens and therapy, it’s about a community of wellness, families and veterans who understand each other as they live together and look out for one another. “That is a treatment in itself,” said Smith.

Smith credits Bastion’s success to his team and its commitment to and love for veterans. He said that every day he feels like he’s won the lottery. Recalling his time practicing law in the private sector before he took the Bastion job in 2022, Smith said he had been “feeling the need to return to work in service of the community.” He said, “Bastion gave that back to me. The reason I put in so many hours is because I get more from them.”

Smith is not surprised that New Orleans is the place to make the Bastion community a reality. “No one understands community like New Orleans,” he said.

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Driving through residential areas impacted by Hurricane Ida in 2021, Smith said that he saw “at least one person on every block was cooking food on a grill to share.” This reality of “neighbors helping neighbors” is something that he previously witnessed after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

That was another time in New Orleans when he was able to see, firsthand, the community and resilience of people taking care of each other during the worst of times. This reality is one reason why Smith believes that Bastion and New Orleans are a perfect fit. “Every New Orleanian should be proud that Bastion started here,” he said.